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SUBJECT: MURDERED INGUSHETIYA OPPOSITIONIST BURIED AS  
FINGERS POINT AT CAMP OF FORMER PRESIDENT

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan Elliott; reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (SBU) Former Ingushetiya oppositionist Maksharip Aushev was buried October 26 according to strict Muslim practice, one day after he died in a hail of gunfire October 25 while driving near Nalchik, the capital of the northern Caucasian republic of Kabardino-Balkaria. Ingushetiya president Yunus-Bek Yevkurov offered his condolences to Aushev's family and called his murder "a heinous crime intended to destabilize the region." Rumors have begun to swirl about Aushev's murder, with his associates calling it a "political murder" while the Russian government blamed it possibly on his "commercial activities" and "relations with criminal elements." Human rights activists have concluded that Aushev's murder is further proof of the dangerous nature of their work in the volatile North Caucasus and questioned Yevkurov's ability to bring peace to the troubled region. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Former Ingushetiya opposition leader Maksharip Aushev died October 25 in Kabardino-Balkaria after unknown assailants fired more than 60 bullets into the car he was driving. A female cousin of Aushev's riding in the car also received life-threatening wounds and was taken to a local hospital. Aushev, a businessman, first became involved in human rights work in Ingushetiya in September 2007 when his son and nephew were taken into custody as suspected insurgents. Aushev organized a mass demonstration and the two were released. Aushev continued his opposition to then Ingushetiya president Murat Zyazikov, and after the August 2008 murder of fellow oppositionist and founder of "ingushetiya.ru" website Magomed Yevloyev while in police custody, Aushev took over the opposition website. After Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev replaced Zyazikov with Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, Aushev ceased his opposition activities, gave up his work with the website which became for all intents and purposes pro-government, and became a close advisor to Yevkurov. He also became a member of the Council of Experts of Russian Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin.

¶3. (C) Different versions of the cause of Aushev's murder have begun to surface. Ingushetiya's current opposition leader Magomed Khazbiyev told reporters that the blame for Aushev's murder lies with the republic's current leadership, noting that on September 17 there was a previous attempt to kidnap Aushev by masked men in an heavily armored law enforcement vehicle shortly after he left a meeting in the capital of Magas with the head of the republic's security committee. Khazbiyev's associate Musa Pliyev told us October 26 that although this was a "political murder," the government has advanced five possible explanations, none of which are related to his work as a human rights defender or opposition leader. (Note: Pliyev had traveled to Turkey with Aushev upon the advice of friends in September after the September 17 kidnap attempt, flying there via Nalchik, but

returned to Russia after only two weeks. End Note). A representative of the Investigation Committee of the Russian Federal Prosecutor's Office told reporters that Aushev's murder could have been connected with his business activities or his relations with criminal elements or even people involved with demonstrations orchestrated by Aushev in 2007 and 2008 to protest illegal detentions. For their part, law enforcement officials in Kabardino-Balkaria stated that although the murder took place in their republic, Aushev was not well-known there and the search for his assailants should focus on Ingushetiya.

14. (C) Commentator Yuliya Latynina believes that Ruslanbek Zyazikov, former President Zyazikov's cousin and the head of his security is responsible for Aushev's murder. She pointed out that although he became a confidant of Yevkurov's, Aushev still had an axe to grind with Zyazikov, who took up a job with the Federal Security Service in Moscow after his ouster as president of Ingushetiya. In an article that appeared on a Russian internet news site, Latynina stated that in his role advising Yevkurov, Aushev had acted as an intermediary between the Ingush president and a leading member of the insurgency in the republic concerning a possible amnesty for insurgents operating there. According to Latynina, the negotiations were not successful, but law enforcement officers were able to track members of the insurgency and shortly thereafter killed them. Soon thereafter, Yevkurov was almost killed as the result of a suicide bomber that exploded a car laden with explosives next to his armored vehicle. (Note: The Kommersant daily's lead North Caucasus correspondent Musa Muradov had alluded to us about secret negotiations between Ingushetiya's president and members of

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the insurgent shortly before the suicide attack on Yevkurov, but without mentioning Aushev's role. If true, this might be another possible reason for his murder. End Note).

15. (C) Human rights activists in Moscow are reeling from the loss of yet another of their own in the North Caucasus, equating Aushev's murder to that in neighboring Chechnya of Memorial's Nataliya Estemirova in July 2009 and charity worker Sarema Sadulayeva and her husband one month later. Human Rights Watch Moscow deputy director Tanya Lokshina stated that the killing shows the level of impunity with which those who wish to human rights activists and representatives of civil society operate in the North Caucasus. Memorial's Aleksandr Cherkasov was more strident, stating that Aushev's murder shows that the government in Ingushetiya is not capable of providing for the safety of its citizens.

Comment  
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16. (C) Whatever the motive behind Aushev's murder, his death casts a further pall on Yevkurov's efforts to bring Ingushetiya back from the brink. If calls of the current opposition to Yevkurov gain traction, we could see the republic step back to the violent public demonstrations that marred Zyazikov's last year in office.  
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